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MISSIONARY CONSECRATION OF PASTORS.

A PAPER

READ AT THE MEETING OF THE A. B. C. F. M., AT HARTFORD, OCTOBER 4, 1876.

BY

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SECRETARY OF THE BOARD.

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MISSIONARY CONSECRATION OF PASTORS.

Those who attended the annual meeting at Rutland, in 1874, will remember that $400,000 were deemed a fitting sum to ask of the Congregational churches, year by year; and it was hoped that other sources of income would yield $100,000 more. Our financial history since that time has shown — (1) that in order to the highest missionary results, we need more than $500,000; (2) that our churches have failed as yet to contribute $400,000 a year; and, further, that the other sources yielded during the past year less than $83,000.

The Committee have no evidence that our constituency, as a whole, regards an expenditure of $500,000 as too large. On the contrary, they have abundant evidence that many are strongly opposed to a lower scale. Hence they feel compelled to ask, "How shall the increasing demands of the missions be met?" Here, in a region so rich in Puritan memories, in a population as intelligent as it is prosperous; here, looking out upon the wide and fruitful fields which the Lord of the harvest has invited us to occupy, they submit the inquiry.

Various answers may be given; but one, in their judgment, takes precedence of all others, to wit, "In order to our reaching that high plane whereunto we are called, *a heartfelt consecration to the missionary work, on the part of pastors, is indispensable.*"

The commission which these brethren have received is as broad as it is weighty. They are ambassadors to lost men; they are teachers of the way of life; they are leaders and guides for all intrusted to their care. With more comprehensiveness it may be said, "They are to do *for*, *with*, and *through* their congregations, whatever the Lord Jesus Christ prescribes. What, then, does He wish them to do for the evangelization of the world?

Permit us to isolate one of the many pastors whom we are happy to meet here at this time, and to address him personally.

Dear brother in Christ, our fellow-worker unto the kingdom of God! Let us suppose your Saviour, in some favored moment, to enter your study, and sit down by your side. He opens to your wondering vision his infinite pity for our race. To do this the more surely, he takes you back to the dawn of eternity, and by some mysterious process he shows you the Father, the Comforter, and the uncreated Word, three yet one, pondering the question of human redemption. They study it in all its vastness, in all its relations and interrelations, not in one cycle, but in all cycles. He permits you to catch a glimpse of that love which is so far above and beyond all finite thought. You are not startled, therefore, you are hardly surprised, when the Only Begotten of the Father surrenders himself with a consecration, which none besides could have made, to this great endeavor.

He shows you the joy that is set before him, (1) in transforming the poor lost ones of earth into the children of the Highest, so raising them to the fellowship of angels and archangels, so making them heirs with himself to that inheritance which the Father has enriched with all the wealth of the universe; (2) in quickening and intensifying the love, the wonder, the ecstasy of the heavenly host, not merely because of the ever-increasing number of the saved, but because of the resources, multiform and exhaustless, whereby the wisdom of God has achieved its measureless results; (3) in illustrating the silent, harmonious co-working of all the divine perfections, so that justice and mercy are seen to walk hand in hand, each more resplendent because of this fraternal companionship; (4) in founding a kingdom greater than all other kingdoms, upholding, defending, encircling all other kingdoms, He to wear the crown alone, He to collect and concentrate the brightness of all the diadems of earth, and place it upon his own imperial brow.

Now he transports you to scenes which lie far down the stream of time. You become the friend and daily attendant of the Son of Mary. You see all that he suffered from the contradiction of sinners, as also from his hourly contact with them. You are with him in Gethsemane. You follow him to the cross. You listen to that cry, piercing, heartrending, beyond all that this world has heard till now, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" With the two Marys you go to the sepulchre and share in their "great joy," in that he did not see corruption. You stand with the eleven on the mountain in Galilee, and hear that commission, "Go," "disciple all nations." Bewildered as you have been all along, you are more bewildered now than ever. "Can it be?" you ask. "The First Born of every creature! Has he tendered to his people a partnership of love and service in this life, and in the life to come a partnership of transcendent honor and blessedness?" You look back from the supremest moment in our lower annals to the supremest moment in the heavenly annals, and you say, "Yonder, where I saw it, redemption was devised. At Calvary, where I saw it, redemption was achieved. Henceforth it is to be redemption wrought out, instrumentally, by those who have themselves felt its transforming might, 'to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.'"

You stand by his side once more on the eastern slope of Olivet. It is the last time; you know it, — all know it. Once more you hear his chief commission. In token of its unspeakable urgency, in token of its central place in the scheme of redemption as seen from its earthly side, it receives its third, its final announcement, "Ye shall be witnesses" "unto the uttermost part of the earth." "And when he had spoken these things," "he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of your sight."

You that represent the pastoral office here to-day! You will never be honored by such glimpses of the divine plan as seen from its heavenly side. Never in his human form will Immanuel sit down by your side, and disclose the affluence of his grace. But if, burdened with the thought of his infinite love for the lost, yourselves among them, you say to him,

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" be sure that light will arise in the darkness. If you desire a consecration to his service, as a world service, that shall please him, be sure that you will receive the "promise of the Father."

But when, dear brethren, you shall have reached this higher level of Christian purpose, certain problems may present themselves, toward the solution of which a few suggestions may be deemed appropriate.

I. You may be embarrassed, as many are, by the comparative claims of the work abroad and the work at home.

It is the belief of the Committee that no Congregational minister who is true to his office can lightly esteem the latter. This wide domain of ours, with its firm grasp upon the great sea of the east, and the greater sea of the west; with its immense resources; with its fast increasing millions; with an interblending of races, creeds, sympathies, hopes, aspirations, as strange as it is portentous; Romanism and skepticism — either of them among the mightiest forces of the age — stubbornly arrayed against evangelical truth; surely it is not difficult to foresee the vast possibilities of good and evil which a single century may evolve. And should the evil gain the mastery, it would be as if Saturn or Jupiter were to leap from his orbit, and roam at will among his brother planets.

But the argument for the home work is so strong as to be in some degree a source of danger. That which is near, soonest fills the eye. Family wants make a strong appeal, as they should. Church wants and parish wants take the second place. The claims of neighborhood, the state, the country, follow in due order. Constant familiarity with these, deepens the feeling of their urgency. It is for this reason that so many mission churches are slow to relinquish their hold upon the hand which has helped them. In every missionary field to-day, at home and abroad, there is the same desire for continued aid.

But He who is able to check every tendency, however subtle, and avert every peril, however stealthy, has provided just the safeguards which are needed. Objects which are near, he balances with others which, though distant, are larger. From the home field which pleads so eloquently, he bids us look away to fields which are broader, needier, sadder. The Committee do not suggest any comparison between the two great departments of Christian effort. Indeed, they regard them in fact as so thoroughly interdependent that if one suffers, the other must suffer also. For the relief, however, of those who may differ from them, and to illustrate the self-adjusting harmonies of Christian beneficence, they beg leave to say, that "*a generous support of the work abroad helps the work at home.*" In proof of this the Committee adduce the following considerations: —

1. *Foreign missions have taught our churches the safety of large undertakings.* Individuals, churches, communities, nations, are ignorant at times of their own resources. We of the North had not the faintest conception of what we could do, when the fiery storm of 1861 burst upon us. And so it has been all along the history of missions. The doctrine preached at Nottingham in 1792, "expect great things *from* God, attempt great things *for*

God," has been constantly verified from that day to this. Who would have ventured to prophesy all that Carey, the journeyman shoemaker, the village schoolmaster, the humble preacher, accomplished for India. When the vote was passed at Bradford which called the Board into life, did any one look down the vista which then opened before him, and foresee all that has since come to pass? When our fathers, in the winter of 1811–12, with only $1200 in hand, voted to send five missionaries to Hindostan, who could have believed, in that day of small things, that $6,000 would be placed at their disposal in three weeks? The value of these incidents, and others like them, was beyond all price. They revealed a strength of faith, courage, enterprise, as stimulating as it was unlooked for. How many endeavors of the highest moment might be traced thereto? What harvests have been gathered at the West, year after year, from the seed which was cast upon the waters at that early epoch!

2. *Foreign missions have done much for doctrinal purity.* The service which the Board rendered, even in its infancy, can hardly be prized too highly. Its founders held the Puritan faith with a confidence in its truth, fully matched by their confidence in its efficacy. What Paul had said of the heathen in his day, they believed to be true of the heathen in their day. What he said of the progress of the Gospel, they believed could be realized again. They laid their foundations, therefore, in a spirit that was thoroughly Pauline. The first missionaries, for the most part, were trained in Andover Seminary, which began its work just in time to take its place as a true yokefellow. No men have been truer to the traditions of New England. After they commenced their labors, their testimony came back to us as clear as it was strong. They were filled with humiliation and awe, as they beheld the depravity which on every side of them was so appalling. But they had, as they well knew, an infinite Saviour to sustain them, as also an infinite Saviour to urge upon the heathen. The influence which they sent back, therefore, was large and helpful, — (1) in confirming the churches in the faith which they had received from the past; (2) in showing the supreme value of the essentials of Christianity, as compared with its non-essentials; (3) in proving the adaptation of scriptural truth, if presented simply and lovingly, to lost men the world over.

The Committee crave the privilege of saying that they have endeavored to follow in the footsteps of the fathers. It has been their aim to send forth laborers who should be worthy to receive the mantles which the elder prophets, sooner or later, must needs leave to the younger. And they desire to record their devout thankfulness for the good hand of their God upon them. As they turn to the different mission fields, and behold venerable forms coming out from the shadows of the past, — a long procession, — they cannot but congratulate the Board, not merely because of the work which has been done, but because of the workers.

3. *The educational value of the foreign service is much greater than most have supposed.* Could we gain access to the annals of our Congregational households, we should find that to many of them missions have proved a constant benediction. The departure of the two earliest detachments, in circumstances which clothed the act with all the interest of novelty,

romance, and Christian heroism, carried to our fire-sides an inspiration as generous as it was elevating. The ends of the earth had never seemed so near ; redemption had never seemed so vast ; humanity, even in its lowest depths, had never seemed so precious ; sacrifice for the unknown and undeserving had never seemed so noble.

The disappointments at Calcutta, as unexpected as they were strange, the death of Harriet Newell, deepened the interest. And when the history of that life, so brief and yet so fragrant, was given to the world, it cast a spell upon the old and the young, which abides with many to this day.

And what a flood of light has been shed upon questions of race, language, topography, history ! How many problems that once were accounted intricate and bewildering, are made clear to-day ! That stumbling-block and rock of offense on the Bosphorus, in the eye of all Europe, — what a pivot it has been for the grandest events in the past; and what a pivot it may prove for like events, or grander still, in the future !

The letters of the missionaries to the churches at home, and their words from time to time, during their needful furloughs — how instructive and how quickening they have been ! At the college, the seminary, before the great congregation, or wherever they have spoken, how much have they done to inform the mind and enlarge the heart !

4. *Foreign missions have taught our churches the highest form of benevolence.* It is not the *quantity* of giving so much as its *quality* that determines its value. The costliest offering may shrivel to nothing beneath the All-searching eye; while that of the poor widow may become a memorial forever. Men may devise liberal things for the west, from the impulse of patriotism ; they may devise liberal things for the east, from the impulse of public spirit. We call such deeds praiseworthy, as they are; and yet the motive, confessedly, is not the purest and best.

But when a man gives of his substance because of his Saviour's last command, or from a desire to see the Pacific Islander, though repulsive exceedingly, the pariah of India, the Bushman of Africa, transformed into the likeness of Christ, he ascends to the highest plane of earthly benevolence. He expects no return, save that which may accrue from the grateful intercessions of his unknown beneficiaries. Never in this life will his eye rest upon the fruit of his self-denial. The giver and receiver will never meet till the hour, when, in the hush of their transcendent joy, they shall look for the first time upon their common Judge and their common Saviour.

Such offerings bear the image of the heavenly ; they are all written in the book of remembrance, against the final Apocalypse. They verify that saying, as true as it is comprehensive and profound, " It is more blessed to give than to receive," — not *as* but *more*, — " more blessed " because of the manifoldness of the good which proceeds therefrom, like the outspreading circles on a quiet lake.

The Committee are obliged to arrest the argument at this point for lack of time. They will only add that they regard the missionaries abroad as supplementing, practically, the labors of the missionaries at home ; and they regard the Board as having been, for fifty years, a most helpful auxiliary to our national Home Missionary Society.

II. Another problem, more directly practical, you will submit to us in this wise, perhaps: "Assuming that we are anxious to discharge our whole duty, what course shall we pursue?" The first step, as also the most important, will be to convince your people that you take a profound and abiding interest in missions. If you are conscious of possessing that interest, but feel that you might have done more to prove it, go to them without delay, as "the man whose eyes are open." Speak to them as one who has been admitted, in some sort, to the secret of that soul-travail, which is to be followed by such amazing, such endless issues. Speak to them as one who has caught some foreglimpses of the grandeur of that kingdom, which is slowly but surely infolding all other kingdoms. Your words will carry a benediction to them not only; they will take back a larger benediction to yourself.

The Committee attach special importance to this initial step. And they are persuaded that there is in the Congregational pastorate much more of susceptibility in this regard than the churches have supposed. They are confident that if all should set forth, on a predetermined Sabbath, their convictions, desires, and hopes, in their full strength, the revelation would prove a grateful surprise to all.

1. In speaking of measures, the Committee place in the foreground *well-laid plans for imparting information.* Of this, if report speaks truly, there is a serious lack.

The value of the pulpit in this endeavor must be obvious to all. And it so happens that there are no better themes for sermons, anywhere, than those which are found in the domain of missions. Some have made the discovery by actual experiment, having preached thereon, with special frequency, to the acknowledged profit and satisfaction of their congregations. They have supposed it to be their duty to hold up redemption, not merely as a doctrine for civilized lands, but as a central and vital truth for the world. They have felt burdened by the conviction that if Christ has died for all, then he should be preached to all. The Committee venture to suggest that if any pastor will form a plan for a series of discourses, to be delivered at fitting times, and will enrich them with fact, argument, appeal, such as the Bible, the history of man, and especially the history of missions, will furnish, he will find at the end of a few years that the profit thereof, as well to himself, as to his hearers, has greatly exceeded his expectations.

The best agency, however, for diffusing information is the monthly concert. The Committee are aware of the perplexities which beset this meeting, but they do not propose to discuss them at the present time. They must be allowed to express their surprise, however, that the difficulty of finding themes of sufficient attractiveness is made so prominent. With such fields as Turkey, India, China, Japan before him, and with all the annals of the past at his command, how can any pastor think himself straitened for materials?

Take that topic which has so deeply interested the Christian world of late, the ever-recurring Eastern Question. Suppose one of your number to have begun, years ago, to ground his people thoroughly in Oriental

missions. He has told them of the growth of that power which came out from the East, far back in the past; established itself first at Broosa, then at Adrianople; and from that point swept like a storm of fire across the entire region which, in the last few weeks, has been the scene of such fierce conflicts, such bitter hates, such terrible cruelties, — and onward still, even to the gates of Vienna. He has told them of the conquest of Constantinople; how that ancient city succumbed to its invaders, not because of their prowess, but because of the jealousies, dissensions, perverseness, and cowardice of the Christians, so called, who professed to defend it, and so an entrance to that land which has been so dear to the church in all ages, was made possible for American missionaries, — an entrance which the Greek empire, intolerant, effete, worthless, would never have conceded. He has told you of the wonderful changes which have been wrought there in these later years, so silent that few have suspected their importance, and yet so real and mighty that they must needs take their place among the acknowledged factors in some of the grandest problems of our race. Having made his people familiar with this large segment of history, how easy for him to speak of the causes, remote and proximate, of the existing war, the strange complications growing out of diversities of ancestry, religion, historic affinities and repellences, above all of western diplomacy; and how easy to point to that unseen Hand, unrecognized for the most part by the actors in this momentous drama, which directs all events for the honor of the only begotten Son!

2. The question of *ingatherings* remains to be considered. The Committee are obliged to confess that it is always with blended feelings that their thoughts turn to this subject. The steadfastness and large-heartedness with which many contribute to the work of the Board, year after year, fill them with thankfulness and admiration. But the meagreness of the offerings which come from quarters whence they have hoped for better things, and the large number of those who give nothing at all, affect them not less profoundly than sadly. They cannot avoid the conviction that every church member, by the mere fact of his discipleship, is committed to the missionary service. He who enters into covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the customary form, and yet refuses to do anything for the heathen, they are constrained to think, keeps back part of the price.

Most of our membership recognize the duty of commemorating the death of Christ at the times duly appointed therefor. The words, "This do in remembrance of me," are accepted as clear and imperative. The frequent neglect of this ordinance is followed by remonstrance, if not by discipline. How, then, has it come to pass that the other command, announced with such unequaled solemnity; that command which is the expression of an infinite longing for the redemption of man; — how has it come to pass that that command is broken so grievously, so constantly, and yet, seemingly, with the connivance of our churches!

The *first* duty of pastors, in the judgment of the Committee, is to secure a contribution from every communicant, if practicable, and also from every non-communicant, if practicable, in the belief that the injunction, "Let him that heareth say come," is unconditional, and hence that a refusal to

accept the offer of pardon by no means justifies a refusal to make known that offer to those who have never heard it.

The *second* duty is to persuade all, if possible, to give as the Lord hath prospered them. In order to success herein, frequent, patient, faithful instruction will be found indispensable. Habits of giving are not easily changed. Habits of withholding are more inveterate still.

The *third* duty is to select the best plan for taking collections. As the object is to induce all to give as the Lord hath prospered them, the inquiry will be, "Which method, this or that, will meet the conditions of the problem?" It is but a step to the conclusion, "Boxes, as they are generally used, do not meet these conditions." On the other hand, the visits of collectors, cheerfully and conscientiously made to every household, have been very effective. Weekly offerings, especially when raised to the dignity of Christian worship, have been attended with admirable results. But the impression cannot be too deeply lodged in the minds of all, that no system is self-executive. In order to a proper outcome from any plan, there needs to be a steady hand behind it.

It will be said, perhaps, that there is one serious objection to the foregoing suggestions, to wit, that they impose additional labor upon pastors. The Committee are obliged to concede the truth of this allegation. But (1) the world can never be saved without a large amount of toil and self-denial. The life of Christ was a constant sacrifice. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and surely the disciple is not above his Master. (2.) Whatever additional service may be needed, no part thereof, not the smallest, will fail of its reward. He who uttered those words, — just as the heavens were opening to receive him, — that were to be the culminating proof of his infinite compassion for man, however sinful, will say of those who long for the triumph of his Word, with no bated stress, "Him that honoreth me, I will honor."

When the Board met in this city twenty-two years ago, there sat with us many pastors, — Porter, Hawes, Dwight, Linsley, and others like them, — who have since been summoned to the presence of the Great King. Suppose that from their celestial homes they were to speak to their brethren who are here to-day. Might they not say, "Were you to stand for the briefest space where we stand, there would be no thought of toil, self-denial, sacrifice, but rather, and only, of privilege, honor, intense delight. Here, on the one hand, are myriads upon myriads who have come up from all the 'habitations of cruelty.' There, on the other hand, is the Lord that bought them. These, once so low, now so high! See with what radiancy of love they turn to the Crucified One! He, — but who can sound the depths of his joy? He sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied! Surely, with such a spectacle before you, calling to mind the power which you can wield for the uplifting of the heathen, you will exclaim with passionate emphasis, 'Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.'"